

Ford Renting Investor's House Called Irrelevant to Strip-Mine Bill Decision

By Carroll Kilpatrick
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A White House spokesman yesterday shrugged off criticism that President Ford is renting a house in Vail, Colo., from a wealthy businessman who stands to benefit from the President's veto of the strip-mine bill now on his desk.

The President sent word to Congress last week that he would veto the measure, which would require stricter regulation of strip mining.

Richard D. Bass, 44, a businessman with wide financial interests, owns a seven-bedroom house in Vail that the President and his family will use for about 10 days beginning Sunday.

Bass will move into the Mr. Ford's three-bedroom condominium during the President's stay, and the President will pay Bass \$100 a day out of his own pocket for the use of the larger house, the White House announced Wednesday.

It was disclosed later that Bass, who is a rancher, geologist and ski area developer, also is a large investor in strip



RICHARD D. BASS

... owns house in Vail

mines. One report said that if the President signed the bill the potential cost to Bass would be in the millions. When asked about the issue yesterday, White House press secretary Ron Nessen quoted the President as saying: "The first time I knew he owned one ounce of coal was

when I read about it at 7 a.m. in The New York Times."

Nessen added, "The President does not make environmental or strip-mining decisions based on whose house he is renting in Vail."

On Wednesday, when Nessen announced plans to rent the Bass home, he said the President had met Bass on several occasions in Vail.

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Bass, who lives in Dallas, could not be reached yesterday, but he was quoted as having told The Times Wednesday:

"I guarantee you that I've never said one word to President Ford, nor would I, about any of my personal interests with regard to business. I want my relationship with him strictly social and revolved around skiing."

Nessen announced that the President would leave early Sunday for Vail and would work about half a day and ski about half a day. He is expected to return to Washington Jan. 2.

The President told his staff and Secret Service escort that many vacationers will be in Vail when he is there and that there should be as little disruption to the vacationers as possible, Nessen said.

The President also expressed the hope that the White House press would respect the interests of the vacationers and get in their way as little as possible, the press secretary said.

In other actions yesterday, the President announced that he would nominate Joseph Laitin, director of public affairs for the Office of Management and Budget, to be assistant secretary of defense for public affairs.

If confirmed, Laitin would succeed Jerry W. Friedheim, who resigned in September.

A former newspaperman, Laitin was deputy White House press secretary in 1965 and 1966 and later served in the old Budget Bureau, where he first met James R. Schlesinger, now Secretary of Defense.

The President also said he would nominate Robert J. Corber, a member of the Washington law firm of Steptoe and Johnson and former state Republican chairman in Virginia, to the Interstate Commerce Commission.